

Mr. Barry L. Carpenter  
Deputy Administrator, Livestock and Seed Program  
Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA  
Room 2029 South Building  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250  
March 30, 2003

Dear Mr. Carpenter,

My letter is in reference to Docket Number LS-02-02 concerning Meat Marketing Claims. It has two parts: part one urges you to withdraw the proposed meat marketing claims and standards and begin the process over again. Because we need good standards, I urge you to consult closely with family farm, consumer, humane and environmental organizations before issuing a final proposal. The second part of my letter is an effort to elucidate a reasonable standard for grassfed beef, as well as some comments on some of the other proposed standards.

I am a producer and purveyor of "Grass Fed" beef ([www.morrisgrassfed.com](http://www.morrisgrassfed.com)). The Standards and Claims regarding this product, therefore, have a direct bearing on my family's well being. Historically, my family has used the label of "grassfed" for our beef, and that nomenclature has powerful meaning for us and for our customers. It is of utmost importance to us and a quickly growing number of producers and consumers in the United States that the integrity of the labels "grass fed," "free range," and "antibiotic free" be protected.

Chief among my concerns is that the claims regarding grass fed foods not include anything to do with grain feeding, grain by-product feeding or confinement feeding of any feedstuff. If ruminant animals are fed amounts of grain which they did not eat as their bodies evolved, the healthfulness of the food they produce is diminished. Further, if those animals are removed from the land from which their food is harvested or from the harvesting process of that food, the ecological health of the land is diminished. Any claims made about their important food products must, therefore, safeguard the integrity of these nutritional and ecological considerations.

Regarding the proposed minimum standards and claims about beef that is "Grass Fed":

First, my impression is that the aim of the Claims and Standards is to enable consumers to make important, though perhaps arcane or subtle, distinctions among available products and to allow them to understand the principal differences in the production processes by which those products are produced. In other words, the standards exist so that consumers can distinguish what is actually valuable to them about different products. As far as possible then, the standards should be simple to understand and unequivocal in their meaning. Every effort should therefore be made to write standards that clarify rather than blur the distinctions between products.

With that in mind, I suggest that the standard for "Grass Fed" should be changed from its present form: "Grass Fed--Grass, green or range pasture, or forage shall be 80% or more of the primary energy source throughout the animal's life cycle." My reasoning is that by this definition almost all beef cattle produced in the United States would qualify, thus there is no distinctive meaning in the claim.

The claim "Grass Fed" should be understood to mean that:

1. The animal shall be fed **no** grain, grain by-products, or animal by-products from birth to slaughter; **and**
2. Other than its mother's milk, grass, green or range pasture, or forage, including silage, haylage, hay, and dormant range grasses, legumes and forbs shall be at least 98% of the animal's primary energy source from birth to slaughter; **and**
3. Up to 2% of the animal's primary energy source may be supplied by an oil-seed supplement (e.g. soybean meal, canola meal or sunflower); **and**
4. The animal shall **directly harvest at least 80%** of its nutritional needs from birth to slaughter from growing or dormant pasture; **and**
5. The animal shall be fed exclusively on growing or dormant pastures.

These three claims could be accomplished by virtually all who raise cattle in the United States, and they would help promote the ecological virtues of the practice of raising cattle on, and in order to sustain, living rangelands.

Regarding "Grain Fed" claims:

1. That "Livestock are finished on high concentrate rations (grain feeding) in order to enhance meat palatability," is a debatable statement;
2. First, grain feeding is primarily a function of economics not concerns about palatability; and, second, that grain feeding does "enhance meat palatability," is not necessarily true. In fact, I believe high concentrate feeding would diminish the palatability of our grass fed beef.

Regarding non-use of hormones:

1. Because "hormone-free," in common usage among both consumers and producers, is unequivocally understood to mean that no "supplemental or added" hormones have been administered to the animal, it should be accepted as an acceptable claim by the USDA.

Regarding the non-use of antibiotics:

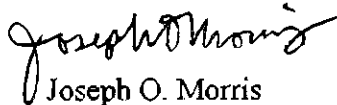
1. Because technology cannot always detect the use of antibiotics, it should not be used as a standard. The claim should be simply whether antibiotics have or have not been used. "Antibiotic free" would then have meaning. If "sub-therapeutic" antibiotics are to be under a claim, they too should meet the same standard: they either have or they have not been used, and the term "sub-therapeutic" must be defined.

To reiterate:

The raising of livestock on living pastures has specific and important ecological consequences that quickly become net ecological losses when the animals are removed from the pasture and confined. Further, the meat and milk produced from these animals is nutritionally distinct depending on the source of the animal's food. These differences constitute real and verifiable values to both producers and consumers. Therefore, any claims and standards formulated by the USDA regarding these foods must, one, enable consumers to evaluate the desirability of the products according to their values and, two, enable producers to meaningfully distinguish their products according to their values in the marketplace.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Joseph O. Morris

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